

**'FORTY ACRES AND A CROW'**  
**A**  
**COMPARISON OF SOLDIER SETTLEMENT**  
**IN**  
**AUSTRALIA**  
**AFTER THE TWO WORLD WARS**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
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**I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.**

**I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.**

**[Redacted Signature]**

**April 1996.**

## P R E F A C E

A soldier settlement farm of 1,129 acres in the picturesque Upper Hunter region of New South Wales has been my home since 1987. My husband and I left jobs in Sydney with hope and in trepidation, like the World War II soldier settler's widow who preceded us. She and her husband established a farm in 1958 on one of the thirteen ballot blocks which were obtained by the State Government from the Cuan Pastoral Company for War Service Land Settlement. Following her husband's premature death in the mid 1960s, and without any first-hand farming experience, she accepted the challenge of running the property. We witnessed her sadness at leaving the farm nearly thirty years later. She was immensely proud of her achievements in grazing and agriculture and of having successfully raised two sons.

Shortly after our arrival, we set off for a walk towards the creek at dusk. Suddenly all was silent. It was that period of quiet before the sun finally dips behind the mountain and the night sky is born. Simultaneously we were both conscious of the insignificance of human endeavour when compared with Nature's influence on the land. At that moment we understood that our feeble attempts at civilising this farm could be obliterated in a very short space of time.

Today when you drive through the Cuan War Service Land Settlement area very little has changed from the mid 1960s when the homes were established. There remains the aura of the pioneer. The fibro cottages stand as a stark reminder that money earned on these farms was put into stock, fencing, agricultural equipment and a better water supply. Certainly it was not spent on household items in order to ease the drudgery of housework. The car sheds remain, warped by time and many repairs; while the wool shed on our place provides a visual reminder that building materials were in extremely short supply after the war and that the budget was tight.

We inherited a two-stand wool shed with hardly enough room to place the wool table and without any permanent sheep yards. Although little has changed in the architecture of the settlement, none of the original settlers remain. Mostly they sold out in the early 1980s to capitalise on the rising land values, escape the drought and to provide for their retirement in the nearby town of Scone. The son of a settler occupies one farm, but in this case a second block was purchased in order to expand the acreage.

Surrounded as I was by these images of struggle, my interest was aroused. When talking to local people it became apparent that soldier settlement *per se* was perceived as unsuccessful because of the post-World War I experience. Yet the post-World War II settlers who recalled their working lives did not accept this classification. Indeed the majority exuded pride and enthusiasm when relating their achievements on the land. I determined to explore this incongruity of perception by means of an examination of the soldier settlement schemes following both world wars. I needed to know to what extent they really 'succeeded' or 'failed'.

In the preparation of this thesis I received a great deal of guidance and support from my supervisor Carl Bridge and, in his absence overseas, Alan Atkinson. Bruce Mitchell was my initial supervisor. I am exceptionally grateful for their expertise and enthusiasm at all times. Their encouragement enabled me to undertake four years of research and learning with greater confidence.

The staff of the Dixon Library made every effort to fulfil my many requests for information housed around Australia. If there was any difficulty, they were on the phone immediately. As a result, I am exceptionally grateful to Barbara Stenhouse and all the women in the Library for their special care and attention to minor details.

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My grateful thanks go also to Jenny Ensbey of the Public Affairs Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Jacquie Axford of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Rudi Boskovic completed the maps for this thesis. Kent Fedorowich of Bristol (UK) and Heather Pearce of Sydney provided journal articles. Barbara Pillans of Sydney and Margaret Walsh of Scone willingly made available their oral histories undertaken with soldier settlers and their wives around New South Wales. Dr Norma Stephens and my husband John helped with proof reading.

As a result of an invitation to address the Armidale & District Historical Society I received a great deal of correspondence. My grateful thanks go to that organisation as well as Meredyth Hungerford of Bilpin, the Armidale descendants of Kentucky Soldier Settlement farms and Jim Bradley, a retired employee of the New South Wales Department of Lands.

Of course I must not forget the settlers who willingly shared their memories with me and provided the most luscious country style afternoon teas.

Every effort has been made to obtain the permission of known copyright holders. I should be pleased to hear from any copyright holders I have failed to contact.

Finally I should like to thank the staff of the History Department of the University of New England and the students who have attended residential schools for freely sharing their valuable knowledge, helpful suggestions and friendship.

Rosemary Sparkes,  
'Terrylee',  
via Scone, N.S.W.,  
April 1996.

**vi (a)**

**Top to bottom**

**The original cottage on "Terrylee"**

**The garage**

**The woolshed with an extension**





# CONTENTS

<b>Preface</b>	<b>ii</b>	
<b>Contents</b>	<b>vii</b>	
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>viii</b>	
<b>Conversions</b>	<b>ix</b>	
<b>Tables and Graphs</b>	<b>x-xi</b>	
<b>Illustrations</b>	<b>xi</b>	
<b>Maps</b>	<b>xiii</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>		<b>1</b>

## PART ONE

<b>1</b>	<b>Marriage of Dreams</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Men, Money and Markets: The Imperial Bond</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Path to Progress</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The New South Wales Experience, 1916-22</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>'Any Mug Can Be a Farmer'</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>An Assessment of Post-World War I Soldier Land Settlement</b>	<b>92</b>

## PART TWO

<b>7</b>	<b>Quiet Achievers</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>A Great Dream Revisited</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Acquisition</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>The 1950s Price Bonanza</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Bouquets and Brickflats</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>An Assessment of Post-World War II War Service Land Settlement</b>	<b>208</b>

<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>229</b>

## ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Australian Archives
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ANU	Australian National University
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AONSW	Archives Office of New South Wales
AWM	Australian War Memorial
<i>CPD</i>	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates</i>
<i>CPP</i>	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers</i>
<i>HRA</i>	<i>Historical Records of Australia</i>
<i>HRNSW</i>	<i>Historical Records of New South Wales</i>
ML	Mitchell Library
NLA	National Library of Australia
NMEL	Navy and Military Emigration League
NSW	New South Wales
<i>NSWPD</i>	<i>New South Wales Parliamentary Debates</i>
<i>NSWPP</i>	<i>New South Wales Parliamentary Papers</i>
QLD	Queensland
RCI	Royal Colonial Institute
RRC	Rural Reconstruction Commission
RSL	Returned Services League of Australia and Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia
SA	South Australia
<i>SMH</i>	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
TAS	Tasmania
UNE	University of New England
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WLSL	War Service Land Settlement

## CONVERSION TABLE

1 inch	equals	2.54 centimetres
1 foot		30.5 centimetres
1 mile		1.61 kilometres
1 acre		0.41 hectares
1 pound (weight)		0.45 kilograms
1 ton		1.02 tonnes
1 pound = 20s (shillings)		\$2
1 shilling = 12 (pence)		10 cents

## **TABLES**

<b>4.1</b> <b>Estimates of Numbers of Ex-Servicemen who could be Accommodated in Small Rural Industries 1919-20</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>5.1</b> <b>Commonwealth and State Financial Responsibilities with Regard to Soldier Settlement at 1929</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>5.2</b> <b>Percentage of Settlers with Capital by District in Victoria</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>10.1</b> <b>Wool Prices - Annual Averages Measured in Pence per pound of Greasy Wool 1918-1960</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>10.2</b> <b>Types of Farming in which NSW Soldier Settlers were Engaged as at June 1953</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>10.3</b> <b>Exports of Frozen Lamb 1954-59</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>10.4</b> <b>Rural Production - Gross Value - States and Territories in \$M, 1916-1959</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>11.1</b> <b>Loan Funds Appropriated for WSL\$ by Principal States 1946-53</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>11.2</b> <b>Total Expenditure (including advance) for NSW and Victoria</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>11.3</b> <b>Commonwealth Capital Expenditure in Agent States 1955-58</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>11.4</b> <b>Percentage of Failure Among Original Settlers post-World War I and World War II</b>	<b>206</b>

## GRAPH

Index Numbers, Average Annual Rate of Increase, Average Weekly Earnings per male 1953-76 and Average Weekly Income per Farm 1953-76	181a
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## ILLUSTRATIONS

The original cottage, garage and woolshed at my new home on the Cuan Estate	vi (a)
The pioneer 1904, Frederick McCulloch 1855-1917, (Felton Bequest 1906) By kind permission of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne	25 (a)
John Christian Watson, Prime Minister of Australia in 1904 and Honorary Member of the Federal Parliamentary War Committee Photo by courtesy of the Public Affairs Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	45 (a)
"Dalveen" the home of William Hubert Haynes of Kentucky c. late 1960s and the fruit packing shed, c. 1939	60 (a)
<i>The Bulletin</i> , 23 January 1919, "Repatriated", the reality does not compare with the dream By kind permission of <i>The Bulletin</i>	71 (a)
World War I Survivors By kind permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation	84 (a)
The Shovel Brigade By kind permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation	79 (a)
H.C. Coombs c. 1950s Photo by courtesy of the Public Affairs Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	104 (a)

## Text Illustrations

Professor S.M. Wadham Photo by courtesy of Melbourne University Archives	109 (a)
W. Sheahan, Minister for Lands, <i>Farmers and Settlers Journal</i>	133 (a)
Telegram Congratulating the Settler who was successful at Ballot Courtesy M. Walton, Scone	145 (a)
Owner Fights Land Resumption, <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> , 13 February 1951, p.4, Courtesy <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>	146 (a)
The First Wool Clip ready for Auction, c. early 1960s Courtesy A. Wilson, Scone	169 (a)
War Service Homes, post-World War II, Allambie, Sydney	203 (a)
Eric Pumpa and his family shortly after their arrival on the block at the Cuan Estate c. 1959	183 (a)
Post-war Farm House (not WSLS) and a War Service Land Settlement Home Courtesy Department of Land & Water Conservation, NSW	203 (b)
Norman and Hilda Easey's new home approximately two years after their arrival on the block Courtesy Norman and Hilda Easey, Scone	204 (a)

## **MAPS**

<b>Soldier Settlement in Australia post-World War I and II</b>	<b>2 (a)</b>
<b>Soldier Settlement in New South Wales, post-World War I</b>	<b>55 (a)</b>
<b>War Service Land Settlement, south-west Western Australia, post-World War II</b>	<b>189 (a)</b>
<b>War Service Land Settlement, South Australia, post-World War II</b>	<b>194 (a)</b>
<b>War Service Land Settlement, Victoria showing Western District and Gippsland, areas where settlement occurred post-World War II</b>	<b>198 (a)</b>
<b>The Cuan locality map</b>	<b>202 (a)</b>
<b>The Cuan Estate showing size</b>	<b>202 (b)</b>

# INTRODUCTION

Private land ownership has always been an important goal for white Australians. From 1788 to the 1960s the evolving policies of public land distribution had officially encouraged small farmers, because officials gave credence to the notion that social and economic benefits would thereby be conferred on the settler society. Initially this was challenged by pastoralists who moved beyond the known boundaries of settlement and simply took up large holdings. Profit and the status of land ownership provided inducement for free settlers to farm in the Australian colonies, and to battle an often hostile environment. The same motivation persuaded many emancipists, army and navy personnel to settle on the land. An imbalance between large squatters' holdings and those of small settlers emerged as a political issue by the 1860s, and the colonial Selection Acts of the period were introduced to address the problem. Individuals were encouraged to select a small block from the squatters' land and purchase it on a time payment system. But many found that it was inferior land, sometimes without water, and quite unsuited to small scale farming. Undeterred, governments amended their small farm policies yet again. This time the Closer Settlement Acts of the 1890s and early twentieth century allowed for alienated land to be repurchased by governments. A feature of this phase of land settlement was the development of roads and railways to service the farms and enable greater supervision of the settlers. Once again the scheme suffered from indifferent results with many settlers struggling to earn a living from their farm. Nevertheless, closer settlement remained in place. Land settlement was seen as an essential element for Australia's progress, prosperity, and growth in the future.



When the soldiers, sailors and aviators of World War I returned to Australia as heroes they remembered Prime Minister W.M. Hughes and his recruitment pledge that volunteers would be rewarded with pensions, homes, education and training. Since 1916 the main focus of these encouragements was the promise of farm ownership due to the large numbers of unemployed ex-servicemen, and their potential to incite civil unrest and thereby cause political embarrassment. Additionally, the Commonwealth believed it would be an easy matter to transfer the established state closer settlement schemes from civilians to service personnel. The promise of land ownership was welcomed because it encapsulated the returned men's hopes and dreams of an independent way of life. Post-World War I a total of 37,561 men were settled on crown and repurchased land throughout Australia.<sup>1</sup> By 1929 one quarter had walked away from their farms in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia; rising to almost 40 percent in Queensland, and a massive 61 percent in Tasmania. The outcome was a state debt of 28 million pounds.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, for many the scheme was a social and economic disaster. World War II settlers were more fortunate than their predecessors because there were only 12,036 ex-servicemen and they experienced better economic conditions. As a result, the overall failure rate was approximately 10-11 percent, and 4 percent in Victoria.<sup>3</sup> In comparison with 29 percent recorded by the previous scheme, this was an acceptable rate.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Dennis, J. Grey, E. Morris & R. Prior, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, Melbourne, 1995, p.557.

<sup>2</sup> Justice Pike, Report on *Losses Due to Soldier Settlement*, 1929, p.6.

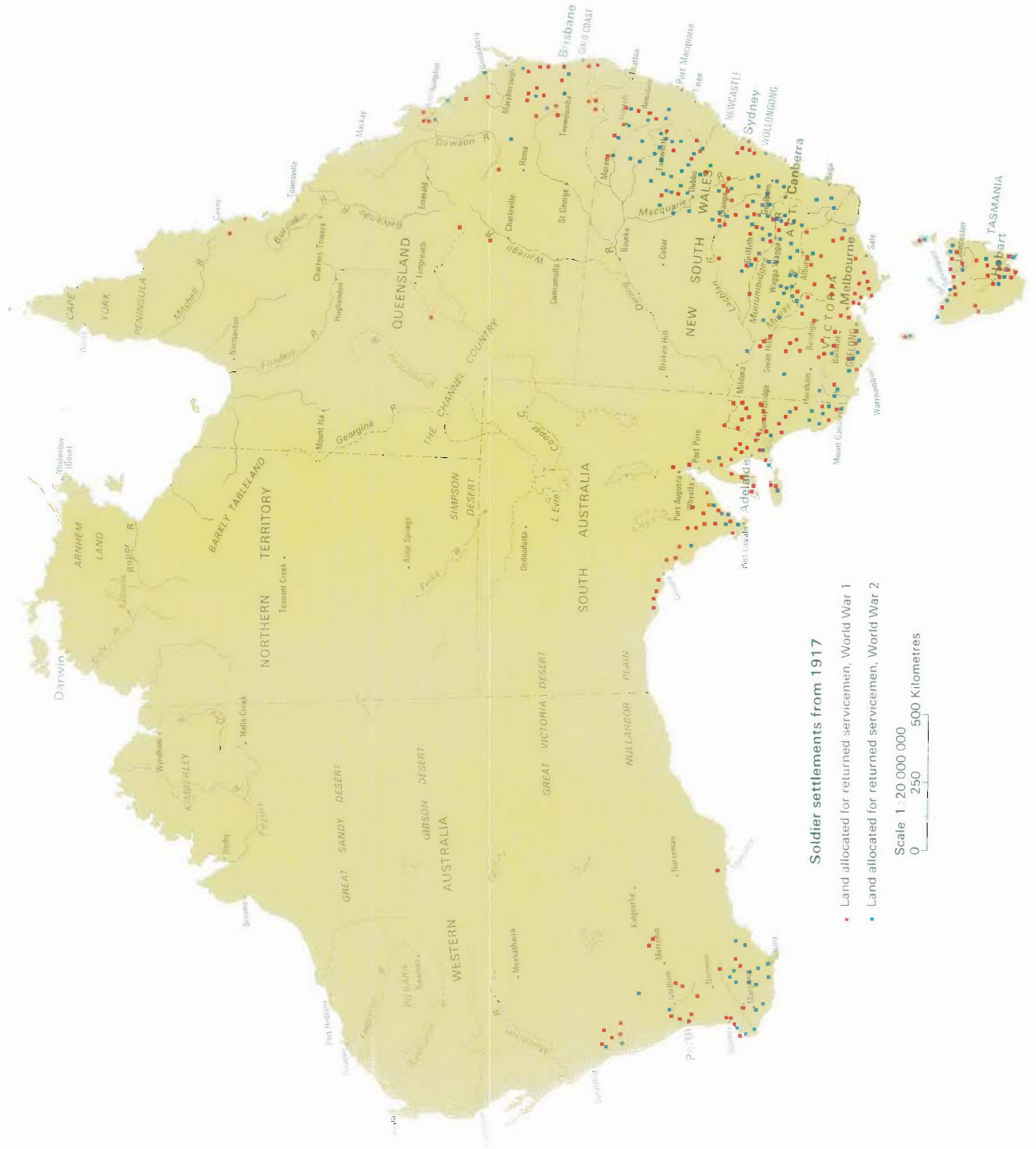
<sup>3</sup> Dennis, Grey, Morris & Prior, ed., *op. cit.*, p.557. It is assumed that the 10-11 percent overall failure rate was for the period of ten years the settlers were legally required to remain on their farms. Ratification of the source of these figures was not available from the editors.

**2 (a)**

**Soldier Settlement in Australia Post-World Wars I and II**

Crowley, Frank and Spearritt, P., (General Eds), *Australians: A Historical Atlas*,  
First edition, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987, p.84

# Soldier settlement



## Soldier settlements from 1917

- Land allocated for returned servicemen, World War 1
- Land allocated for returned servicemen, World War 2

Scale 1 : 20,000,000  
 0 250 500 Kilometres

Despite the fact that the World War II scheme was more successful due to careful planning, talented administrators, lower interest rates and a buoyant export market for the commodities produced on the farms, both schemes have been tainted by the image of disaster which accompanied the first scheme. For instance, in the book *A Big Country: Stories About The People of Australia* the writers reflect on the World War I experience and set the tone of the chapter, 'Land Fit for Heroes': "The soldiers in that settlement must have wondered if surviving the trenches had been at all worthwhile".<sup>4</sup> Yet the image of failure associated with soldier land settlement *per se* has created a myth in Australian history which many historians and writers have for too long left unquestioned. It is not uncommon to find a reference to soldier settlement in articles and history books. However, only too frequently it consists of a brief comment, or at best, a paragraph or two.<sup>5</sup> It appears that the failed settlement experience of 1916-29 has been embraced as a national embarrassment. With some pride, Australians have acknowledged that the men of Gallipoli helped create our nationhood. People do generally accept that the scheme was flawed.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Iddon & J. Mabey, *A Big Country: Stories About the People of Australia*, Adelaide, 1983, p.131.

<sup>5</sup> For example, S.H. Roberts, *History of Australian Land Settlement*, Melbourne, 1924, and C.J. King, *An Outline of Closer Settlement of New South Wales 1788-1955*, Sydney, 1957.

But they then pass over the matter hurriedly as if to avoid more embarrassment. My thesis will challenge the common view that land settlement for ex-servicemen was always a depressing failure.

It should be pointed out that government policies for land settlement in Australia were extremely complex. While the Constitution designated Defence and Repatriation matters to the Commonwealth, the distribution of land remained a state responsibility. Consequently, land settlement for ex-servicemen straddled these two areas of administration. Despite the many complexities which emerge as a result, I consider it vital to present a comparative land settlement study which gives a complete overview of the Australian land settlement schemes after both world wars.

This is a traditional study based on the economic, political and social aspects of the schemes. Although strong emphasis has been placed on the structural weaknesses of both schemes and the potent influence of economic trends, the social impact has not been ignored. Indeed, any measurement of failure or success must take the human experience into account. In addition, there are difficulties in measuring 'failure' and 'success' as in this case there is no distinct delineation between the two. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis, success must be judged on whether the ex-servicemen remained on their farms. Of course, there is no easy answer to this question. One might utilise statistical data in order to determine 'success' or 'failure' and be deceived by this criterion. Some settlers struggled to earn a living on their land because it was their preferred way of life. They endured the struggle, in spite of the fact that they received little financial reward.

The task of this study is to raise the issues which led to perceived 'failure' or 'success' but the answers must of necessity only be provisional.

In 1992 when I commenced research for this thesis, the only recent account was Marilyn Lake's landmark study of Victorian World War I settlement, *Limits of Hope*, which argues that World War I soldier settlers were victims of a flawed scheme which produced peasants instead of yeomen.<sup>6</sup> Yet in the space of four years, three other books have been published which examine various aspects of the settlement experience. Kent Fedorowich's *Unfit for Heroes* provides details of World War I soldier settlement in the dominions set against the backdrop of British imperialism.<sup>7</sup> Fedorowich's research reveals the important influence of Britain and the Empire on Australia's decision to embark on soldier settlement. *The Last Shilling* by C. Lloyd and J. Rees places soldier land settlement into the context of other repatriation and re-establishment policies in Australia, and R. Smallwood's *Hard to Go Bung: World War II Soldier Settlement* examines the Victorian scheme with its unique and successful state administrative structure.<sup>8</sup> For the most part, unpublished university theses have concentrated on the politics of the first scheme.

<sup>6</sup> M. Lake, *Limits of Hope*, Melbourne, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> K. Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire Between the Wars*, Manchester, 1994, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> C. Lloyd & J. Rees, *The Last Shilling*, Melbourne, 1994 and R. Smallwood, *Hard to Go Bung: World War II Soldier Settlement*, Melbourne, 1992.

They have concentrated on the World War I experience within the framework of a particular state, or at the best two states.<sup>9</sup> I have found only four theses which studied the post-World War II scheme.<sup>10</sup> All theses ignored the rich vein of personal files exploited by Lake in her Victorian study. Valuable journal articles by J.M. Powell, K. Fry, Q. Beresford and S. Glynn were confined to aspects of post-World War I.<sup>11</sup> The general emphasis of the books, theses and journal articles is on the first scheme. This thesis attempts to rectify some omissions by integrating the work of historians who have collectively examined various sections of the schemes. Particular attention is placed on New South Wales as, in the past, this state has been largely ignored by historians.<sup>12</sup>

Not only have historians shown little interest in the New South Wales' experience but few have looked at both land settlement schemes introduced in Australia following each of the world wars. Perhaps this is due to three factors.

<sup>9</sup> S.W. Dyer, *Farmers and the Depression: Government Farm Relief in South Australia 1929-1939*, MA thesis, University of Adelaide, 1974; L. MacGillivray, *Land and People: European Land Settlement of the SE of South Australia 1840-1940*, PhD thesis, University of Adelaide, 1982; E. Milton, *Soldier Settlement in Queensland after World War I*, BA Hons thesis, University of Queensland, 1968; M.J.U. O'Sullivan, *A New South Wales Land Settlement Study: Kentucky Soldier Settlement 1917-1976*, B. Litt. thesis, University of New England (hereafter UNE), 1976; D. Parker, *An Assessment of Stanthorpe Soldier Settlements 1915-1930*, BA Hons thesis, UNE, 1982; L.J. Pryor, *The Origins of Australia's Repatriation Policy 1914-30*, MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1932.

<sup>10</sup> H. LeLacheur, *War Service Land Settlement in South Australia*, MA thesis (Politics), University of Adelaide, 1958; S. Copley, *A Comparative Study of Soldier Settlement in South Australia and Victoria 1943-1950*, BA Hons thesis, Flinders University, 1979; M. Vellacott, *War Service Land Settlement in Victoria 1945-60*, B. Litt. thesis, Australian National University (hereafter ANU), 1983 and T.D. Harris, *Soldier Settlement in Australia Post World War II Experience*, M.Ag. Ec. thesis, UNE, 1960. The latter thesis was a disappointment to an historian.

<sup>11</sup> J.M. Powell, 'The Mapping of 'Soldier Settlement': A Note for Victoria 1917-29', *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 3, 1978; J.M. Powell 'Australia's 'failed' Soldier Settlers, 1914-23: Towards a Demographic Profile', *Australian Geographer*, Vol. 16, 1985; K. Fry, 'Soldier Settlement and the Australian Agrarian Myth after the First World War', *Labor History*, No. 48, 1985; Q. Beresford, *op. cit.*, and S. Glynn 'Government Policy and Agricultural Development: Western Australia 1900-1930', *Australian Economic History Review*, September 1967.

<sup>12</sup> The only study on NSW was M.J.U. O'Sullivan, *op. cit.*

Firstly the complex nature of soldier land settlement may prevent historians from attempting a comparative study. Additionally, the perceived failure of soldier settlement may undermine historical interest. However, the main reason could be that historians seek the human tragedy of settlement, and records of a personal nature have not been preserved in some states. For instance, Lake used inspectors' reports for her evidence of the World War I Victorian experience. In New South Wales there are no equivalent records. Searches made for reports on individual settlers post-World War II at the New South Wales Archives proved disappointing and the Department of Lands records referred mainly to land purchase and subdivision.

My study depends heavily on Commonwealth and New South Wales Hansard, reports published in Parliamentary Papers, Repatriation and Post-war Reconstruction files held with the Australian Archives, and newspaper editorials and articles. Oral studies by Margaret Walsh and Barbara Pillans, together with many hours of talking with World War I descendants and World War II settlers, have helped me appreciate the human perspective. A retired surveyor from the World War II period was particularly informative as he was able to provide me with details from an administrative point of view.

Women have been excluded from this thesis, except in their roles as wives and mothers, and this requires explanation. The World War I scheme did include a very small number of settler nurses. But their experience was ignored by the bureaucracy which recorded male and female participants simply as settlers.



In the course of this study the only reference to a female World War I settler was found in Lake's *Limits of Hope*.<sup>13</sup> World War II settlement pamphlets officially included women members of the Defence Forces as eligible. Nevertheless, it was made clear that an unofficial policy of rejection on the grounds of physical unsuitability applied to any woman making application for land.<sup>14</sup> An exception to this practice appears when women were widowed after their husband had been approved for land settlement. In this situation they were encouraged to take over the block, even when they had no first-hand farm experience, as in the case of the Cuan Estate widow.

As previously stated, this study compares the dry land settlement schemes in Australia after two wars in order to discover the reasons for the relative 'success' or 'failure' of each. My assessment examines the Commonwealth's goals for land settlement, as well as its implementation at a state level. Frequently the focus is on New South Wales, as representative of the problems encountered in the states. But the experiences of other states are considered also. The thesis is in two parts, corresponding to the schemes following World Wars I and II.

<sup>13</sup> M. Lake, *op. cit.*, p.87.

<sup>14</sup> 'Land Settlement for Female Members of the Services', Australian Archives (hereafter AA), A606 R2-1-1, 3 July 1945.

There is an assessment at the conclusion of each part. Unlike other studies of Australian soldier settlement, I have chosen here to examine land settlement for ex-servicemen after both wars in its entirety.<sup>15</sup> It is time for a study which integrates previous works and expands into an account of the overall settlement experience.

Part One examines the historical precedence for soldier land settlement both overseas and in Australian white history. It looks at the influence of mythology and the current trends within the society in 1918, as well as the effect that Britain and the Empire had on Australia's decision to embark on a scheme for the returning men. The problems of instigating a land settlement programme are explored. As previously explained, Australia's Constitution conferred a unique system of dual control between the Commonwealth and the states. How both governments responded to soldier land settlement, together with analysis of the scheme from an economic, political and social point of view are issues considered in Part One.

Part Two focuses on improvements to war service land settlement in 1946 through forward planning by a more able bureaucracy, an enhanced status for the Commonwealth, and the implementation of two formal Agreements between the Commonwealth and the states. It examines the scheme against the backdrop of the global and local economy post-World War II, together with developments in agricultural science, and their effect on the settlement experience, in order to ascertain whether the scheme honoured its limited commitment to the ex-servicemen, and whether it was more successful than its World War I counterpart.

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<sup>15</sup> The Tasmanian experience, with the exception of official figures, has received limited coverage in this thesis because only one journal article was found; Q. Beresford, 'The World War One Soldier Settlement Scheme in Tasmania', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, No. 30, 1983. The absence of research supports the notion of a national embarrassment as Tasmania sustained more failures than any other with a massive 61 percent failure rate after World War I and 28 percent post-World War II, Dennis, Grey, Morris and Prior, ed., *op. cit.*, p.557.